

Church Parishioner Saves Own Life By Fast Reaction to Stroke Symptoms

Issue

Ms. Willie S. Gerald, an 86-year old church parishioner, knew exactly what to do when she experienced signs and symptoms of stroke at her home – call 9-1-1 fast! She later told family and friends, “Larry saved my life with a talk he gave at church.”

African-Americans are particularly at high risk for stroke:

- Stroke is the third leading cause of death for African-Americans in South Carolina, resulting in 747 deaths during 2005;
- African-Americans are more than 46 percent more likely to die from stroke than Caucasians in South Carolina; and
- Stroke resulted in 4,319 hospitalizations for African-Americans in South Carolina during 2005.

Intervention

In Horry and Marion County African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Churches, congregations are receiving information on the signs and symptoms of stroke and the devastating effects in the African-American community. The Chronic Disease Manager of the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC) Region 6, in collaboration with the AME Church’s Health Ministries Coordinator, gave presentations on the American Stroke Association’s “Power to End Stroke” (PTES) initiative. PTES is an educational program that teaches signs and symptoms of stroke. The following activities took place:

- A Power to End Stroke Ambassador trained church health coordinators;
- Educational workshops were held for AME Church congregations;
- Church members recited a “pledge” to recognize stroke signs, and vowed to call 9-1-1 if signs should occur;
- Church members signed and returned PTES pledge cards; and
- Stroke and other health-related materials were provided to the congregations.

Impact

Reaching the target population through a faith-based setting proved quite successful. As a result of the DHEC Region 6 AME Church presentations, the following results have been achieved:

- Ten PTES Ambassadors were trained and given additional resources;
- Church members made commitments to monitor their vital signs for high blood pressure, diabetes, cholesterol and heart disease, to prevent the onset or risks for stroke; and
- Potentially, hundreds of AME Church members will receive PTES education in the Marion District.

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